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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ISLAMIC ACTION FRONT TO PARTICIPATE IN AMMAN
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, BOYCOTT ALL OTHER POLLS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

1. The Islamic Action Front (IAF) declared 2 July that it would participate in municipal elections on 26 July but only for seats in the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM). IAF plans to boycott all other municipal polls.

2. IAF Secretary-General Hamzeh Mansour announced the boycott in protest of the recent amendment to the Municipal Elections Law that permits the Prime Ministry to appoint mayors and up to half of municipalities, council members. When questioned over the IAF's participation in the capital, Mansour explained that the GAM election law has, since its adoption 16 years ago, provided for the appointment of some members. The only way he foresees changing the law is through direct involvement in the capital's governmental affairs. IAF believes all council members and the mayor of GAM should be elected by popular vote and that the current structure is undemocratic.

3. Two years ago, GOJ implemented a significant structural transformation program targeting municipal governing bodies. 328 municipalities were merged into 99 larger districts in an effort to reduce costs and reform the work-force. The reform-oriented Municipal, Rural, and Environment Affairs Minister, Abdul Razzaq Tbeishat, defended the amendment, suggesting that it was implemented to connect those qualified to offer citizens efficient municipal services with their elected counterparts.

4. IAF, the political wing of the pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood, is the government's leading opposition party. It holds 18 seats in the new 110-member lower house of parliament that will convene 15 July. Two years ago, 80 IAF members serving as mayors and council members resigned in protest of the government's merger program.

5. (SBU) Comment: A more likely reason for IAF's participation only in Amman municipality is its relatively greater success in Amman in the recent Parliamentary polls. IAF did well in Amman races, winning as much as 49 percent of the vote, according to some analysts. It fared far less well in rural and tribal areas. The IAF boycott of municipal polls outside Amman is likely designed to make a good showing in the capital without risking defeat in the provinces.

GNEHM